

Friday, June 8, 2007

Board Members Meet To Discuss Marine and Aviation Accidents



The National Transportation Safety Board met on Wednesday, May 30, to discuss two accidents. The Office of Aviation Safety presented the first item on the agenda, the crash of a seaplane in Miami, FL, in late 2005. The second item on the agenda was the grounding of the container ship, *New Delhi Express*, in New York Harbor in April 2006, presented by the Office of Marine Safety.

The Board determined that the probable cause of the crash of a seaplane in Miami, FL, in late 2005, was "the failure and separation of the right wing, which resulted from (1) the failure of Chalk's Ocean Airways' maintenance program to identify and properly repair fatigue cracks in the wing, and (2) the failure of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to detect and correct deficiencies in the company's maintenance program."

On December 19, 2005, a Grumman Turbo Mallard (G-73T) amphibious airplane, on a regularly scheduled passenger flight to Bimini, Bahamas, experienced an in-flight separation of its right wing from the fuselage and crashed into the shipping channel adjacent to the Port of Miami shortly after takeoff. Two flight crewmembers and 18 passengers on board were killed; the airplane was destroyed by impact forces.

"This accident tragically illustrates a gap in the safety net with regard to older airplanes," said NTSB Chairman Mark V. Rosenker. "The signs of structural problems were there - but not addressed. And to ignore continuing problems is to court disaster."

The Board found that neither the performance nor the appearance of the airplane would have provided a warning to the flight crew of the right wing's imminent failure. The accident airplane, manufactured in 1947, was operating within its certificated design envelope and carrying normal aerodynamic loads when the wing separated. Pre-existing damage to wing structural components would not have been visible to the flight crew prior to departure. There was nothing the crew could have done to regain control of the airplane after the in-flight separation of the wing, the Board said.

The Board noted that the accident airplane had a history of recurring fuel leaks near the area where the right wing separated that were indicators of internal structural damage. Although some repairs were attempted, many were ineffective in that they did not properly restore the load-carrying capability of the wing structure. The failure of Chalk's to identify and properly repair fatigue cracks in the wing, and the numerous maintenance-related problems found on the accident airplane and another company airplane, demonstrated that Chalk's maintenance program was inadequate to maintain the structural integrity of the company's fleet, the Board said.

The Board also noted that because of the limited availability of engineering services and manufacturer support for the G-73T Mallards, effective FAA oversight was important to maintain the airworthiness of these older airplanes. Although FAA oversight was performed in accordance with existing federal regulations, the Board said, it did not result in the detection and correction of the systemic deficiencies in Chalk's maintenance program and, therefore, was insufficient to ensure the safety of the airline's operations.

In the meeting's second item, the Board determined that the probable cause of the grounding of the *New Delhi Express* was the error of the docking pilot in not using all available resources to determine the vessel's position as he navigated the Kill Van Kull waterway.

Contributing to the cause of the grounding was the failure of both pilots to practice good bridge resource management.

"This accident could have been prevented if previously issued safety recommendations regarding bridge resource management had been implemented," said NTSB Chairman Mark V. Rosenker. "Since 1974, the Safety Board has investigated numerous accidents where the officers on the bridge and pilots failed to function as a team and we have issued numerous recommendations to prevent these types of accidents."

On April 15, 2006, the container ship *New Delhi Express* arrived at the entrance of New York Harbor after a transatlantic voyage. Aboard the vessel were a master, 21 crewmembers, three passengers, and a Sandy Hook pilot. A docking pilot boarded the vessel near Kill Van Kull and assumed the navigational control. The ship was traveling westbound in zero visibility fog when it struck a submerged ledge, took on water through a hull breach caused by the impact and ran aground in the waterway. At the time of the accident, the docking pilot was navigating the vessel. Two of the three tugs assisting the ship were also damaged. There were no fatalities or injuries.

NTSB Testifies On Capitol Hill

National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Mark V. Rosenker told Congress that he was disappointed at the number of recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration on the Board's Most Wanted List that are in an unacceptable action status.

Testifying before the Subcommittee on Aviation of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure on Wednesday, June 6, Chairman Rosenker noted that, of the six items before the FAA from the Board's Most Wanted List, five of them have been color-coded Red, for Unacceptable Response. These deal with reducing dangers to aircraft flying in icing conditions, preventing runway incursions, improving audio and data recorders and requiring video recorders on aircraft, reducing accidents caused by human fatigue, and improving crew resource management for Part 135 (air taxi) operations. The sixth item, eliminating flammable fuel/air vapors in fuel tanks of transport category aircraft, has been given a Yellow color code, meaning that the FAA's response is acceptable but progressing slowly.

The Safety Board's Most Wanted List of Safety Improvements was devised in 1990 as an additional way for the NTSB to focus attention on a group of safety recommendations selected for intensive follow-up. In addition to the recommendations to the FAA, the list includes recommendations to the Federal Railroad Administration, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Coast Guard. It also includes a series of recommendations to State governments dealing with highway and boating safety.

Chairman Rosenker pointed out that items on the list tend to be those that are among the most complex and difficult to implement. However, he concluded, "while the FAA has made some progress, I am disappointed that there are so many recommendations on this list that are in an unacceptable status."

Member Hersman Promotes Safety Advocacy

Member Hersman spoke to the FMCSA's Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Advisory Committee on May 16, 2007. The Advisory Committee is charged with preparing a report to Congress on the state of the current CDL program and making recommendations for improvements to the system. Her presentation included information on medical oversight of commercial drivers from the 1999 New Orleans, Louisiana, "Mother's Day" motor coach accident and training for drivers of air-braked vehicles used in interstate commerce from the 2003 Glen Rock, Pennsylvania, accident. Dwight Foster (HS-1) and Julie Perrot (SRA-10) accompanied Member Hersman and helped to prepare her presentation.

On May 21, Member Hersman testified before the New Hampshire Senate Transportation and Interstate Cooperation Committee in support of House Bill 802, legislation to require seat belt use by all vehicle occupants. While in Concord, Member Hersman and Danielle Roeber, SR-30, met with the Committee Chairman, the Committee Vice Chairman, and staff from the Governor's office to discuss seat belt safety laws. The New Hampshire currently has no seat belt laws for adults.

Cook-Out At Walter Reed

Chairman Rosenker expressed his appreciation for the overwhelming volunteer spirit of the safety board staff, their spouses and siblings who participated in the Wounded Warriors and Family Members Eat, Meet and Greet at Walter Reed Army Hospital in the Army Community Services building, this past Tuesday, June 5th. The NTSB's involvement was a follow-up to our participation in the White House initiative National Volunteer Week project in April. Sixty-four NTSB staff members stepped forward and provided 35 home cooked dishes and donated 54 gift cards worth over \$1500; they did all this on their own time, at their own expense, as volunteers. Approximately 45 to 50 wounded vets and their family members attended the event. The food was plentiful; there was enough left over to provide many dishes to both Fisher Houses on base, where many family members stay while working to rehabilitate their wounded vets. The Safety Board received kudos from the Army Community Services staff for the manner in which this event was planned and conducted.



Chairman Rosenker talks with a wounded veteran

Upcoming Courses At The NTSB Training Center

The following courses are being offered at the NTSB Training Center in Ashburn, VA throughout the summer months. For more information please reference the Training Center's website at: <http://www.nts.gov/TC/TrainingCenter.htm>, or contact Paul Schuda or Phoung Callaway.

June 28 - Media Training for Accident Investigators

July 10-11 Motorcoach, Bus and 15-Passenger Vans

Aug. 7-9 Emergency Responders

Aug. 14-15 Managing Communications During an Aircraft Disaster

Aug. 16 Transportation Disaster Response - Airport Preparedness Program

Aug. 23 - Media Training for Accident Investigators

Sep. 10-21 Aircraft Accident Investigation